

Towards a **SANE** SOCIETY

A surreal image of a chess king piece standing on a checkered floor, with a bright light and clouds behind it.

EDITED BY

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15 | CURBING MALPRACTICE IN EXAMINATIONS: THE ANTIDOTE FOR A SANE SOCIETY

OLUJIDE A. ADEKEYE

INTRODUCTION

Examination is a common phenomenon in the life of a student; hence, it is accorded great respect by students. A student's journey through the educational system is usually punctuated with evaluations/assessment and these evaluations/assessments are usually administered in the form of tests, quizzes or examinations. Examination as a periodic test and measurement of students after a periodic acquisition of experience (Iife 1999).

It is a general consensus that education is a means whereby an individual is guided to develop intellectually and to acquire certain skills adjudged to be necessary for his/her living and for the upliftment of the society in which he /she lives. It is acquired through an organized study or instruction as in school or college (Encyclopaedia Americana, 2000). The function of education therefore should be geared towards increasing those characteristics necessary for the individual's effectiveness and examinations are the instruments used for assessing these individual competences both in general areas and in specific areas of studies, as well as the overall academic achievement.

Examinations are those end –of –term or end –of- course assessment procedures which are bigger tests'', they are more formal and are usually anxiety provoking (Ipaye 1982). He went further to assert that students make distinctions between tests and examinations and that some of theses distinctions reflect in the fear and anxiety they express about examinations. He then concluded that fear, anxiety and other feelings constitute pressures which push students to want to do well in school and which invariably lead them to all forms of examination malpractices. Conducting examination in Nigeria has become a huge mockery because of the massive leakage of question papers, reckless impersonation and hiring of mercenaries by students (Idukugbo 2006).

CONCEPT OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE

Examinations are common features of any educational system. It is a measure of one's intelligence, achievement or ability in a specified domain. It is an incontestable fact that Nigeria is faced with severe economic difficulties and everybody seems to be concerned with how to solve the economic problems to the detriment of education. One of the most debilitating problems facing our education today is that of examination malpractices which has really manifested itself in schools, colleges and other higher institutions, and as noted by Olushola (2006), the problem of examination malpractice "is not peculiar to a particular level of education, rather, it has pervaded all educational facets in Nigeria-primary, secondary tertiary and professional institutes of learning". It has pervaded and perverted public examinations like the Senior School Certificate Examinations (SSCE), University Matriculation Examination (UME) and that Polytechnic/Colleges of Education Examination (PCE). The growing menace of examination malpractice in our schools is becoming a worrisome and disturbing phenomenon day after day (Olushola 2006).

Olayinka (1996) described examination malpractices as a misconduct or improper practice of an individual in any examination with a view to obtaining good results through fraudulent practices. Examination malpractices now form an important aspect of indiscipline among students in the contemporary Nigerian society, especially in our institutions of learning. Hassan (1987) stressed that examination malpractice is rated as one of the greatest problems that undermine the foundations of educational practice in Nigeria. This is still the case today.

Examination malpractice is anything done by an examination candidate that renders the assessment process unreliable and useless (Bello 1990). It is any illegal means (i.e. cheating) employed by students to pass examinations (Usman, 1994). Olasehinde (1992) noted unequivocally that Nigeria is essentially a certificate-oriented society and that even if they no longer automatically 'open' the door to lucrative jobs; certificates remain the singular potential "open sesame" to higher economic and social status in this country. Interaction with students and colleagues confirms that the desire to pass at all cost is responsible for examination malpractice. It is not surprising therefore that most students place very high premium on the acquisition of certificates. Examination malpractice has thus become a source of concern, according to Omoegun (2002), to all well meaning adults in Nigeria especially stakeholders in education as a disciplinary problem which must be tackled.

Examination malpractices is not peculiar to our institutions of learning alone, the evidence of this was given by Denga (1986). He explained that cheating has been a social problem for most of recorded history. He gave a clear picture of ancient china where applicants for civil service examinations were required to take examinations in individual cubicles to prevent them from copying and they were searched for notes before entering the cubicle. He went further to explain that death penalty was imposed on any examinee caught cheating but in spite of all these harsh measures, cheating still occurred. Edukugbo (2006) corroborates Denga by noting that the phenomenon of examination malpractice did not begin overnight. At first, it was subtle, hence not noticed. Later, the signs became obvious like the pall of smoke over the forest. Edukugbo (2006) noted further that as we entered the new millennium, it was obvious that examination malpractice had become the pain of education in Nigeria.

It could be observed from the foregoing that the reaction of a student to examination depends on a number of factors ranging from psychological, environmental to moral. Health and family background also matters. Students feel that failing an examination is an indictment or a degradation of their self esteem, making them lose respect among their peers and this explains why students look up to examinations with fear and anxiety which invariably leads them into cheating. It is no gainsaying the fact that grades in an examination is understandably a gateway to further education and of entry into the world of work, especially in a competitive society like Nigeria. It is thus not surprising therefore that despite the hard stance and resolve of educational administrators and examination bodies to curb examination malpractices, it still flourishes.

CASES OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICES

Examination malpractices have become a nationwide disease irrespective of the type of examinations cutting across in-school and out-of school boundaries. A high incidence of such is reported in junior school certificate examination (JSCE), senior school certificate examination (SSCE), national examination council (NECO), university matriculation examination (UME), semester examinations and even professional. The prevalence of examination malpractices clearly indicates a supposed failure of the values of our school system. It is an overt demonstration of societal laxity, immorality, inefficient school administration and a seeming lowering of academic standards. The problems and the resulting consequence of examination malpractices stir us badly in the face. Saturday Tribune (15th September, 2007) reported that the West Africa Examination Council

(WAEC) released 956,497 of the 1,275,330 results and that 47,842 candidates were being investigated over alleged involvement in examination malpractice.

Kolo (1991) observed that the West African Examination Council (WAEC) has built some prestige over the years. However, some cases of examination malpractices had been detected (see Njoku, 1990 & Majasan, 1991). Majasan (1991), for instance, in relation to the 1991 senior school certificate examination (SSCE) explained inter alia:

... that was when the next shock came, the news of the leakage of six (6) major papers: English language, mathematics, biology, chemistry, physics, and agricultural Science. The result was the cancellation of these papers and a rescheduling of the exams which meant that staff on distribution spent 7 weeks instead of 5 at work outside their stations.... (p.20)

According to the chairman, Nigeria National Committee of WAEC (1993):

We noted with alarm the increasing wave of cases of examination malpractices. Noting the record number of 52,000 cases which had to be deliberated on by his Examination Committee for May/June 1992 SSCE, the Committee stated 'we have never had it so bad' (pp. 6 & 9).

Nigerian newspapers and magazines are replete with stories of examination malpractices in our institutions of learning. It was reported in The Guardian 28th July 2005 that the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) cancelled 95,000 University Matriculation Examination Students' results. The JAMB Registrar remarked that it was unfortunate that the board was forced to withhold many results due to the large-scale irregularities and malpractice discovered during the processing of the results. The Registrar notes that malpractice took place in all the centres during the course of the examination. Sunday Punch of August 17, 2003 had a story on examination malpractices. The story was titled "55 Arrested over PCE Exam fraud". Among those arrested was a vice principle and a teacher. They were caught by the examination monitoring team of the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board, led by the then Registrar himself, Prof Bello Ahmed Salim. The same scenario repeated itself during the 2007 JAMB examinations where some students were caught at some centres in Lagos State (Topix World News 2007).

The National Concord of Tuesday, February 23, 1993 and Newswatch magazine of July 1, 1991 have good examples, going by their information, various forms of examination malpractices, its incidence and prevalence and techniques of cheating all point to one obvious direction that both Nigeria youths and adults place a very high premium on paper qualification which is the certificate. Many a Nigeria student sees the certificate as a sine qua non for his/her entry into the world of work or of gaining admission into higher institutions of learning, and thus, they go to any length to acquire it. This led Olushola (2006) to conclude that the most disturbing aspect of it all is the participation or involvement of school administrations, teachers, parents/guardians and examination personnel.

In Newswatch magazine of July 1, 1991 under the heading "crookery in classrooms", it was reported that University of Calabar expelled 24 students, their crime: examination malpractices.... the university of Lagos dismissed 54 students, their crime: exam malpractices... in Kastina a "lover boy" lecturer in the Federal College of Education (FCE) was sent home on indefinite suspension, his crime: assisting his "sweet heart" in examination fraud.... Campuses are tense, school authorities and examination bodies (i.e. WAEC, NECO, and JAMB) are alarmed more than ever before by the prospect of massive and systematic examination fraud, perpetrated and perfected by students, teachers, lecturers and non-academic staffers. In 2002, thirty (30) of the one hundred and sixty six (166) examination towns were involved in cheating, which is about 18% of total examination towns. Also, forty five thousand, four hundred and forty eight (45,448) candidates seeking university admission had their results cancelled due to cheating (Salim 2002). As noted by Olujuwon (2006), the consequences of examination malpractice on the students especially are enormous.

Para Mallum, Professor and Former Vice Chancellor of the University of Jos said, "Examination malpractice is breaking new grounds and is fast becoming a culture in Nigeria institutions regardless of what the school authorities are doing, students are becoming more sophisticated in perfecting the art of cheating". Therefore, efforts must be made to minimize, if not totally eliminate cheating in public examinations.

CAUSES OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICES

Perhaps, the first basic step towards curbing cheating among students in examinations is to identify the main causes as well as the major methods of cheating in examinations. Many researchers have carried out studies on the causes of examination malpractices (Hassan, 1987; Obe, 1992; Akanbi, 1995; Obe &

Nigwo, 1996; Ikpada, 1998; Adekeye 2000 & Olushola 2006). The following constitute a summary of some of the causes of examination malpractices, as identified by them:

- Too much emphasis on paper qualification
- Fear of failure
- Inordinate ambition of students
- Poor sitting arrangement
- General moral laxity in the society
- Poor Supervision during examinations
- Lack of qualified teachers for school subject(s)
- Students' bad habits and poor study skills
- Lack of parental support and motivation
- Over crowded classrooms
- Lack of coverage of academic contents
- Urge to meet parents high expectations
- Students' attempt to win societal honour that goes along with success
- Political instability i.e. closure of school and disruption of academic calendar, crash programme etc
- Students/ teacher's unholy alliance.

According to Kolo (1999), the causes of examination malpractices are numerous. Most examination bodies lack disciplinary control over invigilators, teachers and non-teaching staff. Also, there is difficulty in prosecuting offenders. The intensity, zeal and incidence of examination malpractices led the government to go all out to promulgate a decree stipulating heavy penalty (i.e. 21 year jail term). Adekeye (2000) found out that students who expect success but fail tend to cheat next time they write an examination than students who expected failure initially. He posited that when faced with possible failure, students who initially expected success cheated more than students whose initial expectations concerning success was low.

METHODS OR STYLES OF CHEATING IN EXAMINATIONS

Some of the known styles used to cheat in examinations according to Olaschinde (1992) are:

- Giraffing: this is sticking out one's neck to see another student's answer sheet;
- Livewire: this is having access to live' questions before examination time;
- Walkie Talkie: a sophisticated and expensive method which thrives in over crowded examination halls. Students take advantage of the loose invigilation to smuggle out question paper to an arranged helper who works out the number and feeds the candidates with answers;
- Super print: a generic name covering all forms of writing on clothes, underwears, inner lining of blouses, on braziers, handkerchiefs, jacket linings and lapels. On handkerchiefs, the text are written with codes and arranged on patterns that appear from a distance, as a common flowery design.
- Academic Alliance: a relationship established between a brilliant male student and a below – average female student who is called "subscriber". The provider and the subscriber sit as close together as narrow gap between the teeth in the hall.
- Micro-chips: this include pieces of paper not bigger than a normal complimentary card on which students, writing in codes, condensed portions of their notebooks. 2H pencils are preferred for packaging microchips because the strokes are sharper.

Other cheating styles are impersonation, bullet or missiles, ECOMOG, star connection, ECOWAS, lateral connection, insulting and assaulting supervisor or invigilators.

STRATEGIES TO CURB EXAMINATION MALPRACTICES

Cheating has always occurred during examination, since students are always caught either copying from another person's work, or taking in prepared notes into the examination hall or talking during the examination. If therefore, examination malpractices are such a long-standing and global phenomenon, efforts of educators must be geared towards trying to evolve ways of solving the menace. In order, therefore to curb examination malpractices among students, indiscipline must first of all be curbed among adults. In other words, discipline should be restored in every facet of our national life. When this is done, the eventual result is that Nigeria's hope and aspiration of building a strong, virile, prosperous, just, stable and one of the 20 leading world economies by 2020 would come to fruition.

Some of the suggestions being made here are curative, others are preventive or both. According to Kolo (1999), schools should be adequately equipped to facilitate effective teaching and learning. Where schools lack the needed facilities, they should not be accorded recognition by the examination bodies. Even those recognised should have routine inspection to ensure that the facilities are always available. It is a general consensus among psychologists that an enriched environment fosters learning.

Also, the condition of service for teachers should be improved upon. It should be comparable to that of other prestigious professions i.e. medical, law, engineering etc. This will serve as a source of motivation to teachers. According to Yahaya (1998), motivation improves job performance and satisfaction. This helps the teachers to perform their task of imparting necessary knowledge and morals to their students. Obe and Nigwo (1996) posited that teachers should be more devoted to their duties, teach effectively, motivate the students to learn, set tests which are moderately difficult, and mark papers reliably, with neither prejudice, bias nor favouritism. This will invariably prepare the students for examinations.

One important aspect to consider as a means of curbing malpractices in public examinations is the issue of sitting arrangement. Sitting arrangement according to Adekeye (2000), in the examination hall should be organized in such a way that it will eliminate proximity- induced cheating e.g. not more than three students writing different examinations could be made to sit in- between themselves. Also, surfaces of desks in the halls should be painted black so as to prevent students' writing on them. This is imperative because students are fond of writing on the desk important points before time of examination Adekeye (2000).

Students though aware of penalties for cheating in examinations are still not immune from the menace. The Special Tribunal (miscellaneous offences) Decree of 1984 stipulates a 21-year jail term for culprits as a deterrent for cheating in examinations. Hence, students should be properly checked prior to their entering into the examination hall. Many personnel like teachers and the law enforcement agents are given part time jobs by examination bodies and they are supposed to discharge their duties with all honesty and sincerity of purpose. Edugugbo (2006) argues that the gratification some school authorities dangle before the invigilators and supervisors are so tempting that they look elsewhere while the malpractices are going on. Some law enforcements agents accept gratification and hence, are unwilling to prosecute offenders. This therefore means that to curb cheating in examinations, law enforcements agents are expected to live above board. But where such law enforcement agents aid or abet examination malpractices, adequate

information is expected to be given to their employers for necessary disciplinary action(s).

Another important measure to curb cheating is by employing capable hands to serve as invigilators. Investigations have shown that some invigilators contribute to widespread cheating during examinations. It is disheartening to note that some invigilators are made drunk by the school authorities; some are provided with female partners to distract and occupy their time, thus creating room for all sorts of cheating. Invigilators who succumb to the corrupt practices of school authorities and students should be blamed and prosecuted for promoting examination malpractices. In some schools, the numbers of invigilators fall short of the needed strength. Hence, sufficient number of invigilators should be provided to ensure effective supervision.

School counsellors can be of immense help in preparing students for examinations. According to Olayinka (1996), the school counsellor can effectively carry out his or her onerous duties of coping with examination malpractices essentially through group and individual counselling. He advised school counsellors to embark on the following strategies which could be of benefit to the students, teachers and guardians:

- a) Orientation programme
- b) Keeping of students records i.e. cumulative folder
- c) Remedial programme on selected school subjects
- d) Series of talks on:
 - How to study effectively
 - How to use the library effectively
 - How to prepare for examinations
 - How to answer examination questions
- e) Workshop training for teachers on:
 - (i) Continuous assessment
 - (ii) How to generate objective questions
 - (iii) The use of non-testing appraisal techniques

All these are geared towards enlightening, educating and re-orienting students, parents, teachers and school authorities on the imperatives of having examinations devoid of cheating by students and their accomplices. Government and the society have their blames too. Too much premium is placed on paper

qualification and thus, students go the extra mile to make sure they obtain certificate. The extra mile may be positive as in studying hard or may be negative as in resorting to cheating. Government is expected to promote vocational endeavours of her citizens and not only academic endeavours. Also, parents should monitor their children and impart the necessary morals from their formative years. Parents are expected to encourage their children to have confidence in themselves and to depend solely on their abilities to pass all forms of examinations

CONCLUSION

Examination malpractice in Nigeria has attained a frightening dimension and it is highly institutionalized. Efforts of non-governmental organizations (NGO's), government bodies and stakeholder in the education sector to curtail this trend have not yielded any positive fruit. It is saddening to note that school authorities, government officials, examination officials, parents and students are all involved in this menace, hence, the difficulty in curbing its incidence in Nigeria. Saint Moses Eromosele (n.d) notes that examination malpractice thrives in a corrupt country and Nigeria is a corrupt country and that examination malpractice has eaten deep into the people's psyche. Thus, the success of any educational endeavour should be hinged on good, orderly and sequential planning, efficient administration, motivation and adequate funding. Most Nigerian schools lack these; hence, government is expected to be at the forefront to champion the need for efficient and effective school system. The success of any educational system hinges on proper planning, efficient administration, adequate funding and motivation. It should be stated unequivocally that students are in dire need of re-orientation. Series of workshops where resource persons are to speak on the ills of cheating and its gruesome consequences should be organized for parents, teachers and students. This measure will go a long way to reduce the high incidence of examination malpractice among students during examinations.

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